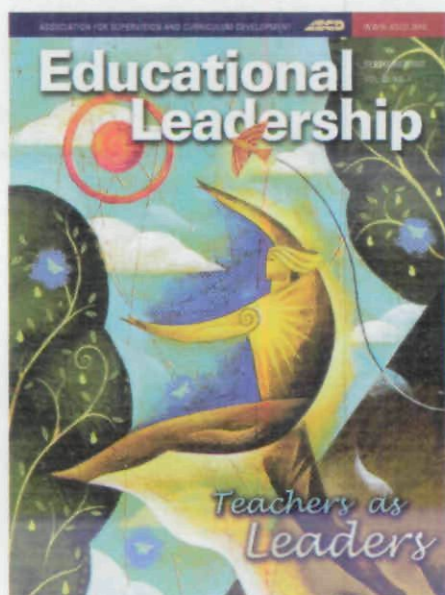


Playing to Strengths

If principals must be politicians, crisis managers, cheerleaders, legal experts, disciplinarians, entertainers, statisticians, and evangelists for their school's mission (Kantrowitz & Mathews, 2007), teachers today also juggle many duties. From classroom manager to subject-matter expert, from caregiver to child advocate, from student of learning theory to life-time learner, teachers, like principals, perform increasingly complicated jobs that take enormous amounts of time beyond a typical workweek.

Enter a new kind of shared leadership about all things instructional. *Teacher leadership* connects teachers and principals in their mutual mission: improving learning for students. For many good reasons and in many different manifestations, as this issue of *Educational Leadership* shows, principals and teachers are sharing instructional leadership. Unlike the movement in the early 1990s toward site-based management, the emphasis on teacher leadership today is less about involving teachers in managerial and administrative duties and more about playing to the strength of their classroom expertise.

For example, as several of our authors (pp. 8 and 14) point out, teachers often choose a career whose domain is chiefly the classroom. They spend their energy developing meaningful relationships with students and making content engaging for students. Indeed, as Richard Ingersoll (p. 20) points out, they also spend a significant portion of their salaries for books and materials that make instruction more meaningful to students. Teachers often remain in their school district longer than both the



principal and superintendent usually do and thus carry with them the institutional memory about effective and ineffective methods and programs. As teachers grow in their expertise, they also desire a change of pace and want to share their skills and learn new ones from colleagues.

The growing research shows that the most important factor in a child's education is having a good teacher; thus, the new emphasis certainly makes sense. By inviting expert teachers to assist in improving learning conditions throughout the school, we aren't removing our best teachers from the classroom. We are extending their reach.

So what is standing in the way of training and acknowledging many more teacher leaders? The authors in this issue suggest that the climate of egalitarianism at all costs is one problem. Charlotte Danielson (p. 14) refers to the "tall poppy syndrome," the idea that stand-

ing up for an idea sometimes results in being cut down. There is also the tradition of closing the classroom door to shut out the outside world. Sometimes it takes significant courage for a teacher to open that door to let others in or to step inside someone else's classroom to share ideas about good practice. Authors in this issue suggest ways to find the time, attitude, collegiality, and leadership to make some significant changes.

Although teacher leadership is still largely informal, several states—Louisiana, Georgia, and Illinois, for example—are adding endorsements to their state licensing systems recognizing teachers who complete coursework in teacher leadership and who then implement school reform, revise instructional programs, coach fellow teachers, foster a school environment conducive to learning, or assume other nonadministrative leadership tasks (Olson, 2007). Such initiatives are promising for schools. Teacher leadership has the potential for improving students' learning as well as the professional lives of both administrators and classroom teachers. **EL**

References

- Kantrowitz, B., & Mathews, J. (2007, May 28). The role of the principal. *Newsweek*. Available: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18754330
- Olson, L. (2007, May 4). Leadership by teachers gains notice. *Education Week*. Available: http://www.teachermagazine.org/tm/articles/2007/05/04/ew_teachlead.h18.html

Marge Scherer
—Marge Scherer

Copyright of Educational Leadership is the property of Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.